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## 2 **Design Thinking to Reinterpret “Mother” Through Kebaya Design**

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13 **Abstract:** Everyone will certainly agree how significant a mother's role is in a family. Without minimizing the role of the father, the figure of the mother in Eastern culture is closely related to domestic affairs at home, one of which is parenting. Eastern educational patterns tend to create boundaries between parents and children, often presenting their own dilemma, especially in urban areas where all parents generally work to get a better life. Artsy people who tend to be introverted and have difficulty conveying their feelings verbally, try to overcome this by presenting a mother figure as their design inspiration. This paper is a design based research by taking samples of the modern kebaya development process in Visual Communication Media Class Academic Year of 2022/2023. The design development will use a 5 steps design thinking approach, with design conceptualization developed together with students from Fashion Communication Class from the same academic year. This paper will investigate approaches that organically emerge in the collaboration process. An empirical study is conducted through a qualitative method to understand how peer to peer private discussion will help to develop a design that has a heart touching background.

**Keywords:** mother; kebaya; collaboration; story telling



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## 1. Introduction

Most of us will agree that mothers play a significant role in a family. Without minimizing the role of the father, the figure of the mother in Eastern culture is closely related to domestic affairs at home, one of which is parenting. In eastern culture, the mother occupies a key position in educating and raising children. Mothers can be a place to lean on for their children and can even become a center for education and role models for children. However, it is no longer surprising that the relationship between mother and daughter generally has its own tension. Along with the development of parenting theory, many young people, from the 90s generation to the millennials, increasingly have access to how different East and West parenting styles are that raise comparison to their own parents, especially mothers.

The figure of a working mother adds complexity in building a healthy and easy communication between mother and child. According to Vureen (in Mufidah, 2009), working mothers are mothers who besides taking care of the household also have responsibilities outside the home either in offices, foundations, or self-employed with a range of 6-8 hours a day. This still does not include overtime, official duties, or

conflicts that may arise in professional life which are very likely to carry over into personal life. The dominance of time spent in the working life, the potential for long-distance relationships with family (in this case children) due to work commitments and children's education options, as well as competitive relationships within the family can be fundamental things that affect the harmonious relationship between mother and child, especially daughters.

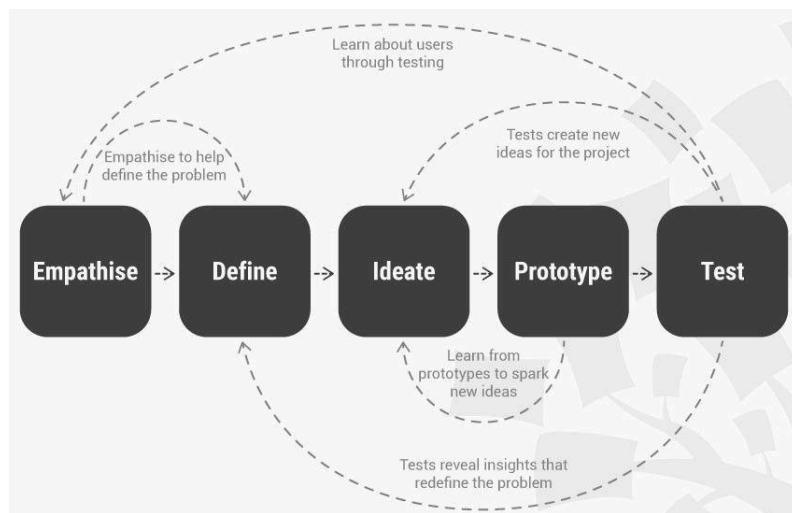
Understanding this phenomenon, the research team tries to investigate how this relationship will affect the individual design from fashion design students. The uniqueness of homogenous design students in terms of their characters, learning styles, and creativity become the red thread in this study. Study programs related to design in Indonesia are generally dominated by women. Society's tendency to categorize design as a learning process that requires precision and delicacy makes this area of specialization seem to be dedicated to women. The Fashion and Textile Design Program at Petra Christian University is no exception. This program is unique compared to the others because the dominance of women reaches 99% making this area look like a girls' school. This program is a hands-on-based design program that emphasizes conceptual skills prior to the realization of works.

The study involved 2 courses across study programs, namely "Visual Communication Media (VDM)" from the fashion line that is all women, and "Fashion Design" course from the communication science which is more heterogeneous. In the "Visual Communication Media" course, students are required to make a personal kebaya design that they will use for graduation purposes. Different from the previous year which gave independence to students to seek their sources of inspiration, in the academic year of 2022/2023, students were asked to understand the relationship between kebaya and women. Hereinafter, they were asked to take the closest female figure in their life to serve as design inspiration. This project collaborated with the "Fashion Communication (FC)" course from the Communication Studies Program from the same academic year to discuss together and retell the design process of each student in the form of visual media.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study conducted in this research used an empirical qualitative approach. This study tries to focus on the process of extracting ideas to reach a big concept that becomes an agreement between the designer and the narrative that can be used. This empirical research tries to document the design thinking method approach that is passed in the VDM and FC courses. This research involved 28 fashion students, 31 communication science students, 3 fashion mentors, and 3 lecturers that are also the research team who designed the collaboration framework.

Before starting each class at the beginning of the semester, the research team discussed to understand the big picture, the possibility of collaboration in the form of collaborative assignments, and schedule agreements. This collaborative activity was then carried out for a duration of 7 weeks by carrying out 4 steps of design thinking (DT) namely emphasize, define, ideate, prototype, and test (Dam and Siang, 2021). These stages may be conducted in non-sequential manners. However, for the purpose of the study, the stage will be delivered sequentially with chances to redo previous steps where necessary.



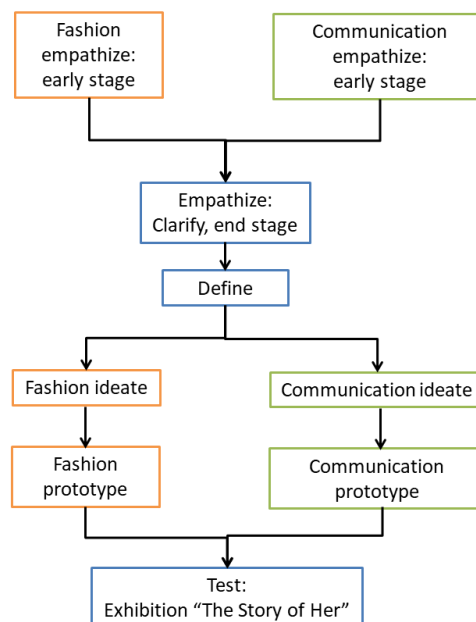
**Figure 1.** Design Thinking Model in use (Dam and Siang, 2021)

Each step is conducted individually by each student. Each fashion design student will be paired to one communication student from the end of the emphasis step. Every 8 fashion students will be mentored by 1 senior designer to guide the data analysis and develop the prototype. The mentor will not be involved in

development of collaboration media until the test stage. Since the numbers of fashion design students are less than the communication students, some of the communication students will share the same fashion design students as their subject to develop the narrative. The activities conducted and outputs are presented in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the model of collaboration used by stage.

**Table 1.** Research Methodologies and Expected Outcome

DT step	Fashion students activity	Fashion students output	Communication students activity	Communication students output
Emphasize early stage	Collecting kebaya data, understanding market, looking for other kebaya designers as typology	Literature review and typology	Collecting data, understanding kebaya, media review, market study	Selection of media and audience review
Emphasize end stage	In-depth discussion with communication students, clarify ideas	Acknowledge significant women	In-depth discussion with fashion students, taking footage, have the consent, clarify ideas	Background story draft, footages
Define	Data analysis, stating problem, making concept	Problem statement, design concept, mood board	Defining coverage angle	Coverage angle (later will be used as exhibition title)
Ideate	Making schematic design	Final sketch for prototyping	Brainstorming on media selection, campaign strategies, visualization	Campaign strategy
Prototype	Production	Kebaya to wear	Production	Individual cover video Group cover video
Test	Display and exhibition	Exhibition	Display and exhibition	Exhibition



**Figure 2.** Collaboration Model

### 3. Results

This section will focus on the discussion only on the 3 parts that become the collaboration stages. These three stages will be presented in a narrative method to expose the challenges and solutions carried out in class.

#### 3.1 Empathize

At this stage, VDM class students (fashion class) looked for data about kebaya, its development, models that are favored by the market, as well as kebaya designers and their work. This data was then shared with FC class students (communication science class). At this early stage, the data provided by VDM

students was quite interesting because it displays modern kebaya elements that are no longer limited to classic kebaya. It's bolder and the deconstructive form gives a lot of room for designer creativity. After the presentation of the design data was distributed, FC students tried to study the relationship between kebaya and women, in this case mothers.

From the survey data it was found that 86.6% of respondents used kebaya for certain event needs. In addition, respondents also identified kebaya with brocade and curves. 76% of respondents agree that kebaya can be used by all groups and is used as a daily lifestyle. 54.35% of kebaya is quite in demand by the public, therefore more creations are needed by designers to be able to touch people's buying interest. 78.1% of respondents like kebaya which is comfortable and easy to use. 51.37% of respondents said the price of kebaya was quite affordable for generation Z of Indonesian society. 77.9% of Instagram social media is media used to find kebaya references. 76.65% of respondents will also go straight to the outlet store to try on the kebaya.

Kebaya is a regional dress that is widely known by women in Indonesia, generally worn at certain moments such as graduations, weddings and official state events. The kebaya worn by urban women narrates multiple identities, namely not only as national dress and regional clothing but also reflects personal identity, gender identity, class identity and multicultural identity. Urban women articulate themselves through the kebaya they choose to wear as a form of dialectic and negotiation with prevailing values in society (Trismaya, 2018).

As a cultural product, the identity of the kebaya is not fixed because it is formed by the hybridization of various cultures. When viewed from historical factors, it is estimated that kebaya was influenced by India, China, the Netherlands, and Portugal. Based on Javanese tradition, kebaya signifies class identity, namely the aristocratic class and the commoner class through its pattern. In addition, the type of material, the quality of the stitches and the symbolism of the motifs on the batik cloth worn as skirts also mark the user identity. In modern urban society, kebaya is a marker of social class through the lines of design and the quality in which the kebaya produced by the designer will determine what level the wearer is at (Trismaya, 2018).

### 3.2 Define

When the FC class students communicated their ideas about the design point of view that will be narrated, it seems that the VDM class students already had their own ideas. They initially couldn't agree on the figure of the woman to use as the inspiration would be their mother. The difference in understanding the task and the idealism of the design makes them feel much attached to and own the kebaya design. Hence, it is difficult for them to accept that this kebaya can be seen as a form of appreciation for the mother.

In order to overcome this problem, a special meeting was held between the lecturers in charge and VDM class students. The purpose of this activity was to understand the root of the problem, so that the solutions given can be understood and the students not just merely carry out instructions. At this meeting it was discovered that most of the participants were worried about being asked to change their design in order to follow the wishes of the FC class students. They misunderstood the form of collaboration that was carried out.

Others have relationship issues with their mother, so they find it difficult to continue this collaborative development process because in the process they are asked to tell more about their mother. The VDM class happens to be all women in that academic year. At this stage, the most common mother-daughter relationship problem was communication. Whether it's in the form of a lack of time together, strict parenting patterns from parents or comparisons among siblings, to the need to convey expectations that are difficult for them to do verbally. After understanding and agreeing that the existing form of collaboration will not completely change their design, then the collaboration can be resumed. At this stage there were some students who got back to the empathize stage and collected more and more new points of view for the narrative of the story.

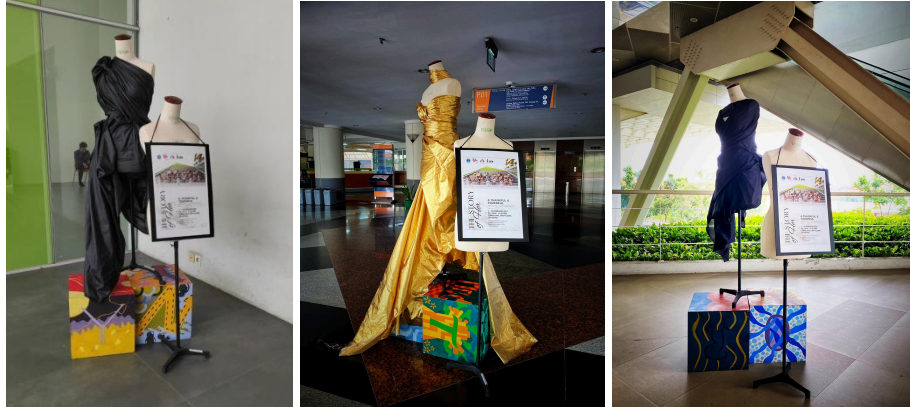
In addition to individual student discussions between programs, FC class students also carry out discussions in their own class with the supporting lecturers. This discussion aims to determine the main theme that will be used. This discussion resulted in the theme "The Story of Her" for the name of the activity to be carried out. This theme will also become a common thread and shared concept in the FC class work narrative videos. The aim of this project was to deliver the unspoken messages and hopes to the mother, a woman figure that everyone has.

### 3.3 Test

Test is one of the most important stages in the Design Thinking process, as it is where you discover whether your idea solves the user problem uncovered during the Empathize stage. The test stage was initially planned as a small internal exhibition. However, because the shape of the kebayas made by the students were unique and coincided with the kebaya event held by the Surabaya City government, the exhibition was held on a larger scale and involved the participation of the academic community and the deputy mayor as



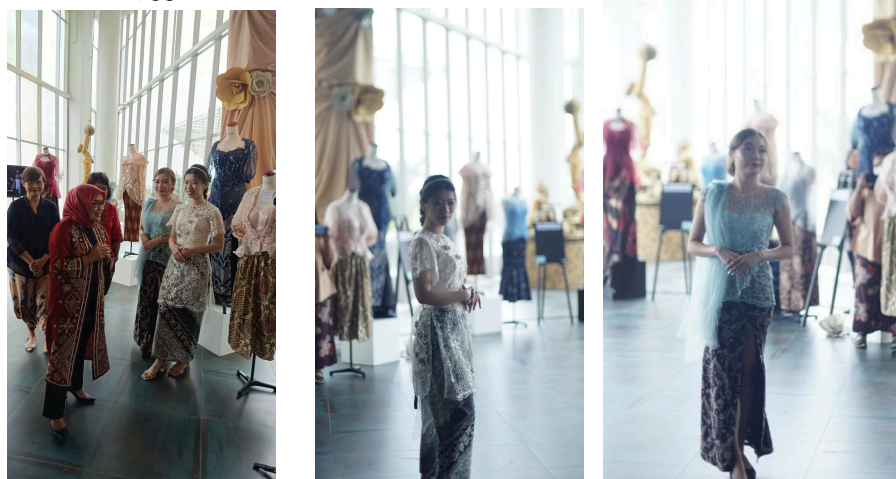
Activity information was conceptualized in a different form than general information on campus activities. If generally activities are published solely in digital form, this time the information is made using offline media to arouse the curiosity of the academic community passing through the campus area. Information is carried out using mannequins and information boards placed at several strategic campus spots for 2 weeks during the class registration period.



**Figure 3.** Mannequins Display

“The Story of Her” Exhibition was held 2 weeks after, on the first week of the new semester to be precise. This exhibition invited all civitas academica starting from staff, students, lecturers, to rectors from internal parties. Apart from that, this activity also invited the deputy mayor of Surabaya to deliver the opening remarks. This activity received good enthusiasm from the participants who actively participated in leaving messages for their mothers in the interactive spots provided. In addition, several parents also attended as a form of appreciation for their children's work. There were 5 representatives of the best kebaya who carried out their work in fashion shows. They have the opportunity to convey messages to their parents directly.





**Figure 4.** Exhibition Situation

## 4. Discussion

In its implementation, students in the field experience difficulties, especially at stages that require collaboration. Differences in their mind models influenced their learning style and way of communication; therefore it may come as one of the things that will contribute significantly. According to Anthony Gregorc, there are 4 combinations of the strongest mind styles that provide an organized way to consider how the mind works. Those are Concrete Sequential (CS), Abstract Sequential (AS), Abstract Sequential (AS), and Concrete Random (CR) (Mind Styles, n.d.). Each type has common traits as shown in Figure 5.

CONCRETE SEQUENTIAL	ABSTRACT SEQUENTIAL
<p><b>This learner likes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>order</li> <li>logical sequence</li> <li>following directions, predictability</li> <li>getting facts</li> </ul> <p><b>They learn best when:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>they have a structured environment</li> <li>they can rely on others to complete this task</li> <li>are faced with predictable situations</li> <li>can apply ideas in pragmatic ways</li> </ul> <p><b>What's hard for them?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working in groups</li> <li>Discussions that seem to have no specific point</li> <li>Working in an unorganized environment</li> <li>Following incomplete or unclear directions</li> <li>Working with unpredictable people</li> <li>Dealing with abstract ideas</li> <li>Demands to "use your imagination"</li> <li>Questions with no right or wrong answers</li> </ul>	<p><b>This learner likes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>his/her point to be heard</li> <li>analyzing situations before making a decision or acting</li> <li>applying logic in solving or finding solutions to problems</li> </ul> <p><b>They learn best when:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>they have access to experts or references</li> <li>placed in stimulating environments</li> <li>able to work alone</li> </ul> <p><b>What's hard for them?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being forced to work with those of differing views</li> <li>Too little time to deal with a subject thoroughly</li> <li>Repeating the same tasks over and over</li> <li>Lots of specific rules and regulations</li> <li>"sentimental" thinking</li> <li>Expressing their emotions</li> <li>Being diplomatic when convincing others</li> <li>Not monopolizing a conversation</li> </ul>
CONCRETE RANDOM	ABSTRACT RANDOM
<p><b>This learner likes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>experimenting to find answers</li> <li>take risks</li> <li>use their intuition</li> <li>solving problems independently</li> </ul> <p><b>They learn best when:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>they are able to use trial-and-error approaches</li> <li>able to compete with others</li> <li>given the opportunity to work through the problems by themselves</li> </ul> <p><b>What's hard for them?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restrictions and limitations</li> <li>Formal reports</li> <li>Routines</li> <li>Re-doing anything once it's done</li> <li>Keeping detailed records</li> <li>Showing how they got an answer</li> <li>Choosing only one answer</li> <li>Having no options</li> </ul>	<p><b>This learner likes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to listen to others</li> <li>bringing harmony to group situations</li> <li>establishing healthy relationships with others</li> <li>focusing on the issues at hand</li> </ul> <p><b>They learn best when:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>in a personalized environment</li> <li>given broad or general guidelines</li> <li>able to maintain friendly relationships</li> <li>able to participate in group activities</li> </ul> <p><b>What's hard for them?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having to explain or justify feelings</li> <li>Competition</li> <li>Working with dictatorial/authoritarian personalities</li> <li>Working in a restrictive environment</li> <li>Working with people who don't seem friendly</li> <li>Concentrating on one thing at a time</li> <li>Giving exact details</li> <li>Accepting even positive criticism</li> </ul>

**Figure 5.** Mind Styles by Anthony Gregorc (Mind Styles, n.d)

The students from the design program in the VDM class generally have AR patterns. This pattern is very easy to get carried away with, it is difficult to follow structured general instructions orally, and it is difficult to convey the basic thoughts and ideas in a structured form verbally. However, they will perform well in a non-competitive environment and involve hands-on testing. Meanwhile, students from the FC class tend to be more systematic, analytical, and move in a structured order. When these 2 types are found, it takes a more personal delivery and a longer time regarding shared ideas for the AR type to be able to absorb the idea in question before making a decision. In the form of structured tasks and tight deadlines, when these 2 opposite types meet, there is potential for conflict to occur. This appears in the discussion of sub-chapter 3.2.



Due to its traits that are difficult in conveying messages verbally and in a structured manner, footage taken in several meetings and casually conducted in unstructured interviews produced a good impact. It was proven in the repeated shooting carried out by FC class students. This unstructured interview also helped VDM class students to be able to explore small ideas that emerged in the interview session to be able to find concepts that fit their mother's figure.

Previously, fashion students made designs from literal concepts such as being inspired by roses, so they will be applied in the form of rose motifs. However, in this task they have to find out more about the figure of the mother. Taking the example of the 5 best works displayed in the fashion show at the exhibition "The Story of Her", students interpret this figure by taking their inspiration through their mother's favorite, resemblance, values, and common traits of mother. Even though they don't get much together with their mothers because all the mother figures in the following examples of work are working mothers and or live separately from their daughters, the help from colleagues in the FC class can formulate their thoughts and longing for a mother figure in a mature work concept. These are 5 samples of the interpretation:



**Figure 6.** Kebaya Design from VDM Class (Asiah, 2023)

- Sample 1 entitled "Her Ethereal World" by Chavella Christensia  
This work is inspired by the story and struggle of R.A. Kartini in upholding women's emancipation. The designer remembers the tough figure of his mother who never complained about giving the best for her family, like RA Kartini's total struggle. The choice of lace fabric motif conforms to the concept of 'Her Ethereal World' with a combination of geometric shapes and natural floral motifs. Blue is the main color to support the design concept where blue gives the impression of being strong and steadfast as well as peace and harmony. The persistence and struggle of the mother figure is embodied in the kebaya design silhouette which is firm, bold, and dramatic and gives a charismatic impression.
- Sample 2 entitled "Soft Blush" by Angela Tanujaya  
This work was inspired by the Hortensia flower which is the designer's mother's favorite flower. This flower has soft colors besides that this flower can change color if the acidity of the soil where it grows changes. This flower symbolizes the figure of a mother who can brighten up the atmosphere and really support the environment around her, but she needs other parts to survive. The yellow gold color symbolizes a very precious mother figure as well as a form of love and gratitude.
- Sample 3 entitled "O'ginevra" by Angelicia Indrawati  
O'ginevra comes from the word "ocean" which means sea and "ginevra" means wave. The light blue color combination of this kebaya design is inspired by the waves on the sea and has several pearl details that symbolize the beauty of the sea. There are many things and lessons that can be learned from the waves at sea, including sincerity, not giving up, and consistency. It is hoped that the wearer of this kebaya will have the awareness that behind a great child there must be a mother who has these 3 characters.
- Sample 4 entitled "Hashira" by Fiona Jeannice  
This kebaya design is inspired by a royal atmosphere with tall pillars that look luxurious, aesthetic and majestic. The designer chose the pillars as inspiration because of the obligation



of the mother in the family as a support through educating intellectuals, goodness and truth which are important pillars in life.

- Sample 5 entitled “Her Purest Heart” by Megawani Indria Danutirta  
This design elevates the concept of asters. Daisies have the meaning of loyalty, love, beauty, purity, chastity, patience, and simplicity. The meaning contained in the white daisy is able to describe the figure of a woman who is gentle and kind, like the heart of a mother who is very gentle and loving towards her child.

## 5. Conclusions

Design inspiration can certainly come from anything, anyone, anytime, and anywhere. The mother figure is no exception, whose role is so important and conventionally has high hours of togetherness. But in today's urban society, the presence of working mothers has become common. The issue of the relationship between parents and children, especially in this case mother and daughter, is an interesting matter to discuss and serve as design inspiration for interpreting the figure of a mother. The activities recorded in this paper are a form of student collaboration from fashion and communication science programs in their third year of study.

In its implementation, students in the field experience difficulties, especially at stages that require collaboration. Differences in their mind models influenced their learning style and way of communication; therefore it may come as one of the things that will contribute significantly. The students from the design program in the VDM class generally have abstract random (AR) patterns. Meanwhile, students from the FC class tend to be more systematic, analytical, and move in a structured order (concrete sequential/ CS and abstract sequential/ AS).

It is a challenge for AR types to think deeply in the context of tasks and communicate these thoughts in a systematic way. The habit of design students who directly present ideas through pictures must be challenged in this assignment. The presence of peers from the FC class helps to formulate values and design inspiration from the complicated thinking of an AR to become more systematic. Unstructured interviews helped VDM class students to be able to explore small ideas that emerged in the interview session to be able to find concepts that fit their mother's figure.

The design process in this study sequence ended at the test stage by using an exhibition entitled “The Story of Her”. In this exhibition, all students' works from kebaya to videos were presented to gain appreciation. There were 5 representatives of the best kebaya designs that were carried out in mini fashion shows. The designers of these 5 best works interpret “mother” from their mother's favorite, resemblance, values, and common traits of mother. Even though they don't get much together with their mothers because all the mother figures in the following examples of work are working mothers and or live separately from their daughters, the help from colleagues in the FC class can formulate their thoughts and longing for a mother figure in a mature work concept.

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